

VZCZCXRO4893

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FM AMEMBASSY PRISTINA
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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 1206
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1727
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PRISTINA 000397

SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR EUR/SCE, EUR/PGI, INL, DRL, PRM, USAID

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [KV](#)

SUBJECT: KOSOVO: AMBASSADOR MEETS OPPOSITION LEADER PACOLLI

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

1. (SBU) Summary: The Ambassador met with Alliance for a New Kosovo (AKR) leader Behgjet Pacolli and Pacolli's senior advisor, Essad Puskar, on September 11 for an introductory meeting to discuss several domestic and foreign issues including AKR's role in Kosovo's opposition, the importance of tempering extremist Islamic influence, upcoming municipal elections, and Pacolli's role in working for additional recognitions of Kosovo's independence. During the friendly and cordial exchange, the Ambassador told Pacolli that we will work with both the GOK and the opposition to support continuing growth of Kosovo's political culture. End Summary

VIBRANT OPPOSITION A KEY TO KOSOVO'S POLITICAL GROWTH

2. (SBU) The Ambassador, in an introductory meeting with opposition Alliance for a New Kosovo (AKR) party leader Behgjet Pacolli on September 11, said that Kosovo's political opposition plays a key role in ensuring the positive growth of Kosovo's political system. He also warned that partisan political interests should not divert attention from ensuring progress in building Kosovo's institutions and addressing Kosovo's vast domestic economic problems. Pacolli agreed with this. The Ambassador recalled Pacolli's personal business success and the potential for AKR to play a leading role in focusing political discourse on employment, energy, health, and education initiatives. Pacolli recognized the potential for his party's contribution in these regards, mentioning specifically his interest in higher education, including his work with the American University of Kosovo. Pacolli noted that his party's principles are most similar to those embodied by junior ruling-coalition partner Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), although he noted that his party's emphasis on economic improvements filled a niche that LDK does not currently address.

3. (SBU) Moving to upcoming elections, the Ambassador stressed--and Pacolli agreed with--the importance of free, fair, and transparent elections. The Ambassador told Pacolli that parties' recent focus on installing cameras at polling stations distracted attention from more reliable tools for ensuring accurate voting. (Note: AKR, earlier this summer, submitted a formal written request for closed-circuit video surveillance at polling centers during upcoming

municipal elections in November. End Note) The real way to protect the process is not to tear down the Central Elections Commission (CEC) but rather for AKR to join with others in supporting publicly the legitimacy and authority of the CEC and its efforts to carry out technical measures critical to successful elections. Pacolli thanked the Ambassador for his insights and joked that although he knows how to construct a building, he does not know how to build a party, and requested the Embassy's support and advice toward this goal.

ADDRESSING PACOLLI'S ROLE AND INFLUENCE ABROAD

¶4. (SBU) Pacolli expressed his appreciation for the Ambassador's acknowledgement of Pacolli's initiatives to lobby abroad for additional recognitions of Kosovo independence, an issue that Pacolli's advisor Essad Puskar tabled during the course of the conversation. The Ambassador cautioned Pacolli, however, with concern regarding Pacolli's engagement with certain leaders such as Libyan Muammar Abu Minyar al-Gaddafi, with whom Pacolli met in early September. Although Pacolli admitted that al-Gaddafi did not promise Libya's recognition of Kosovo's independence, Pacolli told the Ambassador that al-Gaddafi assured him of Libya's intention to welcome Kosovars to travel and work in Libya. Pacolli mentioned that he often employs Kosovo Albanians in his business endeavors abroad and saw al-Gaddafi's openness as a good opportunity to help Kosovo's poor economic conditions by creating jobs for Kosovo Albanians abroad that would support the local economy through remittances. (Note: Pacolli is the CEO of Mabetex Group, an internationally-known construction firm. End Note)

¶5. (SBU) The Ambassador raised the larger issue of Islamic

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extremism entering Kosovo and cautioned Pacolli about the potential for Albanians working within the borders of regimes like Libya and then returning home with more extremist ideology. The Ambassador told Pacolli that we do not want to see growing extremist influence over Kosovo's moderate pro-Western population. He said that prominent leaders like Pacolli play an important role in ensuring that Kosovo continues its moderate, secular tradition. (Note: Unsubstantiated rumors hold that Pacolli funds the construction of Wahabi-style mosques in Kosovo. End Note)

¶6. (SBU) Comment: The friendly introduction provided the Ambassador with an opportunity to deliver several messages to Pacolli regarding the USG position on a number of domestic and international issues facing Kosovo, leveraging in particular Pacolli's influence as a prominent businessperson and leader of a party that enjoyed notable success in Kosovo's last elections cycle.

We will continue to engage Pacolli and AKR, to encourage AKR to play a constructive role in Kosovo politics and to emphasize the importance for AKR to coordinate its efforts in lobbying for recognitions with the GOK. End Comment

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